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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [CH](#) [HK](#) [MC](#)
SUBJECT: COORDINATION KEY TO HONG KONG LEGCO ELECTION IN
SEPTEMBER

REF: A. 07 HONG KONG 003103

[1](#)B. HONG KONG 000573
[1](#)C. 07 HONG KONG 002949

Classified By: E/P Section Chief Laurent Charbonnet; Reasons 1.4 (b, d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: On September 7, Hong Kong will hold its fourth legislative election since the 1997 handover. The various pan-democratic parties will need to coordinate candidate selections and election strategies to maintain their current number of seats (26 of 60) in the Legislative Council (Legco). Election engineering and tactics will be particularly vital in the highly competitive geographic constituencies. The pro-democracy Civic Party (CP), which may supplant the Democratic Party (DP) as the largest pro-democracy group in Legco, will be a prime target of criticism from the pro-establishment side. One contact criticized Chief Executive (CE) Donald Tsang for his recent controversial political appointments in advance of the Legco election, describing Tsang's timing as "horrible," and the move as a failed attempt at "Chinese-style politics" and cronyism that has created a serious vulnerability for the pro-establishment side in the Legco race. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Comment: The outcome of the September election will strongly affect Hong Kong's path and pace toward eventual universal suffrage, as any potential amendments to the Basic Law)- necessary for reform of the Chief Executive (CE) and Legco electoral procedures)- must be vetted and passed by a two-thirds majority of Legco members. If the pan-democrats are unable to maintain their blocking power in Legco, then the CE and his political allies can push through the requisite Basic Law amendments during the next four years. To maximize their prospects, it will be vital for the pan-democrats to canvass and analyze each constituency and construct ballots accordingly to minimize fratricide in an election where each seat is critical to the camp's future. If the pan-democrats are successful this September, then the Hong Kong Government (HKG) likely will offer only limited reform proposals covering the 2012 CE and Legco elections, and defer any consideration of out-year reform until the next (2012-16) Legco. (Note: The PRC National People's Congress Standing Committee (NPCSC) has authorized universal suffrage for the Hong Kong CE election in 2017, and for the Legco in 2020 or later (ref A). End note.) For this election, however, the pan-democrats appear to face an uphill battle, as the Hong Kong economy is strong, the CE enjoys generally high ratings, and last month's Sichuan earthquake and the upcoming Beijing Olympic Games (just weeks before the election) have generated a wave of patriotism in Hong Kong. In the pan-democrats' favor, CE Tsang's badly managed political appointee controversy continues to resonate and seems likely to become an election issue. End Comment.

Arcane Electoral System

13. (SBU) On September 7, Hong Kong will hold elections for the Legco that will serve until 2012. Legco is comprised of sixty members, thirty from geographical constituencies (GCs), or districts, and thirty from functional constituencies (FCs), which for the most part represent professions. The nomination period for candidates in the election runs from July 19 to August 1. Over the past few months, the Hong Kong media have conveyed a slow trickle of rumor, gossip and speculation about who will run for which seat, and which candidates will lead each ticket. Under Hong Kong's arcane "List Voting System," each party must carefully construct its candidate lists for the GCs. This system, which is not widely understood among Hong Kong voters, favors party tickets that are limited to only the strongest candidates, though parties can also be rewarded for long list tickets under the "largest remainder formula" used in the election. (For more detail on the mechanics and need to formulate tickets by party, vote counting, and related electoral processes, see http://www.eac.gov.hk/en/legco/lc_guide.htm.)

Pan-Democrats: Prospects Uncertain

14. (C) Most Hong Kong politicians and political observers agree that the pan-democrats need to retain their strong one-third blocking minority in Legco, which in practical terms means at least 20, but preferably 22-23, seats in the 60-member legislature. There is wide disagreement, however, on whether they will be able to do so. Under Hong Kong's complicated electoral system, the outcomes are difficult to predict. Election engineering and vote matching -- the

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practice of maximizing the chance of success for candidates by coupling them on ballots based on complementary voting pools -- will be especially key in the six highly competitive geographic constituencies, which will elect a total of 30 Legco members. For example, in the New Territories East district there likely will be four incumbent and four non-incumbent pan-democrats, pitted against three incumbent and two non-incumbent pro-establishment candidates; that is, 13 candidates will contest seven seats.

15. (C) Professor Ma Ngok recently told us that the pan-democrats, who lack funding and a coordinating body with reach across the camp, are particularly disadvantaged in election engineering this type of complex race. When he studied the strategy and mechanics of the pro-democracy parties in the 2004 election, Ma said he was disappointed to find that the pan-democrats had not applied the lessons learned in the 2001 elections, which he feared would happen again this year. Former legislator and current Civic Exchange CEO Christine Loh agreed, and said that when she studied the results of the 2004 election she found there was "a total lack of coordination" among pro-democracy parties. Professor Michael DeGolyer (strictly protect) of The Baptist University of Hong Kong said, however, that the uppermost leadership of the Democratic and Civic parties -- the two largest parties in the camp -- often rely on their close personal and professional relations to coordinate informally on strategic and tactical political decisions. He noted that Martin Lee, Albert Ho, Ronny Tong, Emily Lau, Audrey Eu, Alan Leong, Margaret Ng, all of whom are lawyers, share professional history either through their education, legal cases, or membership in local associations, and rely on these associations to inform their political decisions.

Pro-Establishment Parties Coordinated

16. (C) Professor Ma believes that the Central Government Liaison Office (CGLO) in Hong Kong serves as a coordinating body for pro-establishment parties. The CGLO can use a "carrot and stick" approach, backed by enormous resources and

sway over business deals, political appointments and other favors on the mainland, he said. Christine Loh echoed Ma's view, saying that the CGLO wielded "significant political reach and influence" in Hong Kong. Loh estimated that 400 members of the Communist Party in Hong Kong "led by the CGLO" have, with increasing effectiveness in past elections, lured patriotic voters to register, conducted research and analysis as well as exit polls, and mobilized voters on election days to ensure success at the polls. Loh mentioned her interest in the subject as she is in the final stages of preparing a manuscript detailing the modern record of Chinese Communist Party influence in Hong Kong.

¶17. (C) Ma and Loh both predicted that the CGLO this year would target the Civic Party, which Ma predicted would surpass the Democratic Party's vote share in some districts. He also argued that the pro-establishment side increasingly viewed the Civic Party's "clean image" as a challenge, especially following its successful bid to field a candidate (Alan Leong) to challenge incumbent Donald Tsang in the March 2007 Chief Executive race. Ma went on to say that Martin Lee's decision to leave the DP (ref B), the party's losses in the District Council elections in November 2007, and waning support for "radical democrats" such as the League of Social Democrats, might prompt voters to shift allegiance to the more moderate CP. The pan-democrats will have to carefully factor this and other shifts in the electorate, and monitor voter interests throughout the nomination and campaign period, to construct their ballots accordingly. Regardless, he surmised that these factors could easily make the CP the pro-democracy camp's "flagship party" following the September election.

Races to Watch

¶18. (SBU) The most hotly contested geographic constituency seats include the six seats in the Hong Kong Island district, and the seven and eight seats in New Territories East and New Territories West, respectively. On Hong Kong Island, the key variable for the pan-democrats is whether independent pro-democracy legislator Anson Chan, who won her seat in a December 2007 by-election (ref C), decides to run for re-election. Chan thus far repeatedly has declined to disclose her intentions. Chan's eventual decision will impact strongly the candidacies, strategies, and prospects for success of DP candidate Kam Nai-wai, independent Cyd Ho,

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the the CP's newcomer Tanya Chan, as well as independent Lo Wing-lok. Pro-establishment candidates seeking election on Hong Kong Island, include Choy So-yuk, Jasper Tsang, and Horace Cheung of the DAB, as well as independent Regina Ip.

¶19. (SBU) In the New Territories, vote matching will again be a key determinant of each candidate's success. Strong incumbents such as pro-democracy Emily Lau (The Frontier) and Ronny Tong (CP), and pro-establishment Liberal Party chairman James Tien and DAB vice-chairman Lau Kwong Wah, will need to engineer solid campaigns to hold or gain seats, as there is a long list of competitive non-incumbents on both sides. The same situation prevails in the New Territories West, where even Fernando Cheung (CP), a strong incumbent FC legislator attempting to move to a GC seat, will face keen competition from three other pan-democratic non-incumbents attempting to ride the coattails of Albert Ho (DP), Lee Wing-tat (DP) and Lee Cheuk-yan (CTU).

¶10. (C) In the functional constituencies (FCs), including nine that are determined by individual votes in professional sectors such as accounting, legal, and education, and 21 that are selected by corporate votes, several are shaping up as battles for the pan-democrats, who won seven of the nine individual vote seats in 2004. For example, in the Medical FC, independent democratic incumbent Kwok Ka-ki may be vulnerable because of public concerns over healthcare reform

options currently under debate, according to Professor Ma. In 2004, Kwok benefited from the "July 1 effect," which refers to the massive July 1, 2003 protests over proposed national security legislation that propelled many pan-democratic candidates into office in the 2003 District Council and 2004 Legco elections. Kwok reportedly will face two opponents in this year's race, Louis Shih and Ho Pak-leung, both of whom are independent but influential members in the medical community here. Ma also said that incumbent CP legislator Mandy Tam (Accountancy FC) might lose her race to either Paul Chan or Ronald Kung Yiu-fai (both independents). Similarly, deputy DAB spokesperson and solicitor Christopher Wong Kwok-yan reportedly plans to challenge the CP's Margaret Ng, the Legal FC incumbent who has held the seat since 1995 (except in 1997-98 when Hong Kong's provisional legislature was in operation).

Political Appointee System Disappoints

11. (C) Over the past few weeks, the HKG's announcement of two new layers of political appointees in various ministries has ballooned into a public and political controversy that threatens to persist into the September election campaign (septel). Professor DeGolyer said, "off the record," that he recently exchanged views with Chief Executive Tsang via email, expressing his concerns over the CE's "miscalculation." DeGolyer opined that Tsang's timing was "horrible" and had created a serious vulnerability for pro-establishment candidates. He said the crux of the dispute was whether the appointees are being "groomed" or "recognized," and that the pan-democrats will attempt to convince voters that the appointments constitute heavy-handed political jockeying by CE Tsang. He said Beijing initially probably viewed the appointees as a positive "stop-gap measure" that could help manage the political landscape in Hong Kong during the transition to universal suffrage, but Tsang's message of grooming has been overtaken by one of "Chinese-style politics" and cronyism -- with its long history of rule by politically neutral civil servants -- for which Hong Kong has no taste. Cunningham